RECORDS OF BIRDS AND REPTILES FROM TONGA

B. J. GILL

AUCKLAND INSTITUTE AND MUSEUM

Abstract. Records are presented of birds seen, and reptiles collected, in July 1988 on Tongatapu and three islands of the Ha'apai group (Lifuka, Foa and Lofanga), Kingdom of Tonga. Sightings of birds on Tongatapu, 'Eua, Vava'u and Niuatoputapu by A.P. and E.F. Fabian are given, as are a few records of birds and reptiles based on specimens in Auckland Museum collected before 1988. The White-faced Heron *Ardea novaehollandiae* is reported from Tonga for the first time, and European Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* seen on Foa are the first record of that species from the Ha'apai group. Blue-crowned Lorikeets *Vini australis,* now rare in Tonga, were seen on Lofanga and Niuatoputapu.

Very little has been published on the distribution of birds and reptiles in the Tongan archipelago. The few recent papers are by Dhondt (1976), Rinke (1986a, 1986b, 1987) and Gill (1987). In this paper I have assembled distributional records based on the following:

(1) Observations of birds and reptiles, and collections of reptiles, made by me in July 1988. I spent 10 days on Tongatapu, and 14 days in the Ha'apai group — the latter comprising 6 days on Lofanga, and the rest on Lifuka with day excursions to Foa. Where no observer is given the record is by me at this time. The records of birds and reptiles on the three Ha'apai islands are summarised in Tables 1 and 2. The reptiles collected are in the Auckland Museum collection and the registration numbers (prefix H) are given here.

(2) Specimens of birds (prefix B) and reptiles (prefix H) in the Auckland Museum collection, not collected by me.

(3) Observations of birds on Tongatapu, 'Eua, Vava'u and Niuatoputapu in 1987 and 1988 kindly provided by Mr Paul Fabian (British High Commissioner, Nuku'alofa) and Mrs Eryll Fabian.

Where weights and snout-vent lengths (SVL) of lizards are given, I took these in July 1988 from freshly killed specimens. Morphometrics of adults of three commonly collected lizards are summarised in Table 3.

All sightings of dark noddies *(Anous stolidus* or *A. minutus)* and most sightings of frigatebirds *(Fregata minor* or *F. ariel)* were ignored as the birds were not seen closely enough to identify the species.

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Table 1. Summary of birds seen on three Ha'apai islands, July 1988.

	Lifuka	Foa	Lofanga
Reef Heron	+	+	+
Grey Duck		+	
Banded Rail	+	+	+
Purple Swamphen		+	
Least Golden Plover	+	+	+
Wandering Tattler	+	+	
Crested Tern	+	+	
Many-coloured Fruit-dove	+		
Crimson-crowned Fruit-dove	+	+	+
Blue-crowned Lorikeet			+
Collared Kingfisher	+	+	+
Welcome Swallow			+
Polynesian Triller	+	+	
Polynesian Starling	+	+	+
European Starling		+	
Wattled Honeyeater	+		+

Table 2. Summary of reptiles recorded on three Ha'apai islands, July 1988.

	Lifuka	Foa	Lofanga
Gehyra mutilata	+		
Gehyra oceanica		+	
Lepidodactylus lugubris	+	+	+
Cyrtodactylus pelagicus	+		
Cryptoblepharus poecilopleurus			+
Emoia cyanura	+	+	+
large skink ?*Emoia*		+	
Chelonia mydas			+

Table 3. Snout-vent lengths (mm) and weights (g) of three species of lizards, Ha'apai group only, July 1988.

	mean	s.d.	n	range
Snout-vent length				
Gehyra mutilata	45.0	5.39	5	38-50
Lepidodactylus lugubris	39.1	3.26	12	33-44
Emoia cyanura	46.3	1.98	8	44-49
Weight				
G. mutilata	2.28	0.585	4	1.4-2.6
L. lugubris	1.42	0.358	10	0.9-1.9
E. cyanura	1.87	0.413	6	1.3-2.4

BIRDS

Black-winged Petrel (Lafu) *Pterodroma nigripennis*
Lofanga: B1338, in spirit, coll. S.P. Fanua 14 January 1987.

White-tailed Tropicbird (Tavake) *Phaethon lepturus*
Tongatapu: Several at Hufangalupe Beach and about nearby cliffs. *Niuatoputapu:* Seen August 1988 (Fabian).

Brown Booby (Ngutulei) *Sula leucogaster*
Tongatapu: Seen singly off Fafa I. July 1987, February 1988 and September 1988 (Fabian). One off Hufangalupe Beach July 1988 (Fabian). *'Eua:* Nesting on south-east cliffs June 1987 (Fabian).

Lesser Frigatebird (Helekosi) *Fregata ariel*
Tongatapu: Adult female at cliffs near 'Utulau.

White-faced Heron *Ardea novaehollandiae*
Tongatapu: One on mudflats at Sopu west of Nuku'alofa (6 July 1988). Seen clearly and closely for many minutes.

Reef Heron (Motuku) *Egretta sacra*
Tongatapu, Lifuka, Foa: Common around the coast. One at the lake in central Foa. *Lofanga:* One at a small beach.

In July 1988 total sightings for all islands combined were 12 in dark colour phase, 6 in white phase and 4 mottled.

Grey Duck (Tolōa) *Anas superciliosa*
Tongatapu: 30-40 feeding in lagoon and estuarine pools along coast west of Nuku'alofa (6 July 1988). *Foa:* At least 60 at the lake and swamp at the centre of the island.

Niuafo'ou Megapode (Malau) *Megapodius pritchardii*
Niuafo'ou: B1861, skin, male, coll. R.H. Beck, 3 August 1925 (collector's no. 341). B1855, B1857, B1858, 3 eggs, coll. G.W. Quensell, 26 July 1940.

Banded Rail (Veka) *Rallus philippensis*
Tongatapu: Seen intermittently on the main island in plantation areas and once in a Nuku'alofa garden (Fabian). Seen on Fafa I. June-August 1987 (Fabian). *Lifuka:* One running across main road north of Pangai. *Foa:* One at edge of swamp. *Lofanga:* Several seen on foot-tracks and foraging on the main sandy beach, even bathing at the water's edge. They seemed more numerous and more confiding than on the larger islands.

Purple Swamphen (Kalae) *Porphyrio porphyrio*
Tongatapu: One at Sopu west of Nuku'alofa September 1988 (Fabian). Seen on Fafa I. July and August 1987 (Fabian). *Foa:* A few around edge of swamp.

Least Golden Plover (Kiu) *Pluvialis fulva*
Tongatapu: Common around the coast. *Lifuka:* A few around coast, on fields and on the airstrip. *Foa:* A few around coast. One seen at swamp. *Lofanga:* A few on the beaches.

Wandering Tattler (Kiu) *Tringa incana*
Tongatapu: Common around the coast. *Lifuka, Foa:* A few around the coast.

Bristle-thighed Curlew *Numenius tahitiensis*
Tongatapu: 12 on mudflats at Sopu west of Nuku'alofa (6 July 1988). One at same area early September 1988 (Fabian).

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*
Tongatapu: One on mudflats near Sopu March-April 1987 (Fabian).

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*
Tongatapu: A few on mudflats at Sopu March 1987 and September 1988 (Fabian). A few in same area July 1988. *Niuatoputapu:* A few on sandbank August 1988 (Fabian).

Crested Tern *Sterna bergii*
Tongatapu: Common along shore west of Nuku'alofa. *Lifuka, Foa:* A few around coast. *Niuatoputapu:* A few around coast August 1988 (Fabian).

Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana*
Tongatapu: One over lagoon near Mu'a August 1987 and approximately 20 off Fafa I. September 1988 (Fabian). *Vava'u:* One on mudflat September 1987 (Fabian).

White Tern ('Ekiaki) *Gygis alba*
Niuatoputapu: Seen over wooded land August 1988 (Fabian).

Domestic Pigeon *Columba livia*
Tongatapu: Common in Nuku'alofa.

Many-coloured Fruit-dove (Manuma'a) *Ptilinopus perousii*
Tongatapu: Seen several times at Mu'a 1987 and 1988 (Fabian). *Lifuka:* Seen twice at Pangai.

Crimson-crowned Fruit-dove (Kulukulu) *Ptilinopus porphyraceus*
Lifuka: Fairly common around Pangai and in plantations. *Foa:* Heard in coastal bush but not seen. *Lofanga:* Common, even around the village. Easier to approach than on Lifuka and Foa. All doves seen closely were this species. *Vava'u:* Several seen around Paradise Hotel July 1987 (Fabian).

Pacific Pigeon (Lupe) *Ducula pacifica*
Niuatoputapu: Seen June and August 1988 (Fabian).

Blue-crowned Lorikeet (Henga) *Vini australis*
Lofanga: Seen occasionally in coconut crowns and flying over the village. In ones and twos; no flocking. *Niuatoputapu:* Several seen near houses August 1988 (Fabian).

White-rumped Swiftlet (Pekepeka) *Collocalia spodiopygia*
Tongatapu: Common and widespread.

Collared Kingfisher (Sikotā) *Halcyon chloris*
Tongatapu: Common and widespread. *Lifuka, Foa, Lofanga:* Present but not common.

Welcome Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*
Lofanga: Single bird seen three times (14 July 1988). *Vava'u:* A few at airport July 1987 (Fabian).

Polynesian Triller (Sikiviu) *Lalage maculosa*
Tongatapu: Common and widespread. *Lifuka, Foa:* Present but not common. *Niuatoputapu:* A few seen August 1988 (Fabian).

Red-vented Bulbul (Manufo'ou) *Pycnonotus cafer*
Tongatapu: Common and widespread.

Polynesian Starling (Misi) *Aplonis tabuensis*
Tongatapu: Apparently not as common as the honeyeater. *Lifuka, Foa, Lofanga:* The commonest land bird. All birds seen closely had dark brown eyes.

European Starling (Ngutuenga) *Sturnus vulgaris*
Tongatapu: Seen occasionally. Flock of about 50 at Fua'amotu Airport (9 July 1988). *Foa:* Two seen together in a coconut crown near Lotofoa (13 July 1988).

Wattled Honeyeater (Fuleheu) *Foulehaio carunculata*
Tongatapu: Common and widespread. *Lifuka:* Fairly common. *Lofanga:* Present, but not greatly abundant.

REPTILES

Stump-toed Gecko *Gehyra mutilata*
Tongatapu: House gecko (H1194). *Lifuka:* House gecko (H1195, H1197, H1198, H1200, H1202) and under corrugated iron in plantation (H1201).

In life, adults had a bright yellowish tinge over the undersides excepting the throat. Juveniles had large pinkish spots along the back and pinkish bands along the tail.

Oceanic Gecko *Gehyra oceanica*
Foa: In timber structure at edge of plantation, with *Lepidodactylus lugubris.* H1203, SVL 83 mm, weight 14.1 g.

Mournful Gecko *Lepidodactylus lugubris*
Lifuka: House gecko (H1196) with *Gehyra mutilata* and in foliage close to dwellings (H1216). *Foa:* In timber structure at edge of plantation (H1204-H1212). *Lofanga:* House gecko (H1215) and in natural sites close to dwellings (H1213, H1214).

Pelagic Gecko *Cyrtodactylus pelagicus*
'Eua: From a cave, coll. D.J. Lowe 12 August 1987 (H1052). *Lifuka:* From rotting log in plantation. H1199, SVL 64 mm, weight 6.6 g.

Snake-eyed Skink *Cryptoblepharus poecilopleurus*
Lofanga: From rocks overgrown with low twiggy shrubs in the supralittoral zone. H1191-H1193, SVLs 33 mm, 35 mm, 36 mm.

Blue-tailed Skink *Emoia cyanura*
Tongatapu: From forest litter (H1177, H1179) and coastal grassland (H1178). *Lifuka:* From plantations (H1180, H1181). *Foa:* From coastal forest litter (H1182-H1184). *Lofanga:* From plantations (H1185-H1190).

Large skink ?*Emoia*
Tongatapu: On 8 July 1988 I saw a large (SVL >80 mm) pale brown skink with a pointed snout and long toes and tail, climbing vertically on a concrete block wall at the Tongan National Centre near Nuku'alofa.
Foa: On 13 July 1988 in forest bordering the swamp at the centre of the island I saw three specimens of a large (SVL >80 mm) arboreal skink with pointed snout and long toes and tail. Two were on vertical tree trunks, the third on a horizontal branch over standing water. I watched them through binoculars but could not catch them. They were pale brown with faint widely spaced darker blotches along the back, pale striping across the lips, and scattered dark spots on the belly.

Banded Sea-snake *Laticauda colubrina*
Tongatapu: H354, Nuku'alofa, pres. E.M. Pomeroy 1939. *Vava'u:* H347, H349, coll. J. Parsons 1877-1880.

Banded Sea-snake *Laticauda laticaudata*
Vava'u: H348, H350, coll. J. Parsons 1877-1880.

"Cook's Tortoise" (Tu'i Malila)
Tongatapu: The Madagascan *Testudo radiata* that was kept in the Royal Palace grounds, that died in May 1966, and that had a carapace 24 cm high (Robb & Turbott 1971) is on display at the Tongan National Centre. Among the historical displays at this centre is an old photograph showing a Tongan man standing astride a tortoise much larger than 24 cm high, suggesting that the 1966 specimen is not the original "Cook's tortoise". On 3 July 1988, while attending a feast in the grounds of the Royal Palace, I saw yet another tortoise — a small (presumably young) one — that had the freedom of the grounds.

Green Turtle (Fonu) *Chelonia mydas*
Lofanga: One specimen ashore that a villager had caught for food.

DISCUSSION

The single White-faced Heron seen on Tongatapu is a new species for the Tongan list. This heron is widespread in Australia, New Zealand and New Caledonia, and there are single records of single birds in Fiji (Clunie *et al.* 1978) and Niue (Child 1982).

The sighting of two European Starlings on Foa, appears to be a new record for the Ha'apai group. Once established this potentially damaging species could quickly spread to neighbouring islands.

The Blue-crowned Lorikeet has died out on many of the inhabited southern Tongan islands during this century (Rinke 1986b), so it was pleasing to find them in quite good numbers on Lofanga. The Whitney South Seas expedition collected this species on six Ha'apai islands (Amadon 1942), but not Lofanga. The most recent report confirms the lorikeet's presence on only three Ha'apai islands: 'Uiha, Tungua and Ha'afeva (Carlson MS 1974 cited by Rinke 1986b).

I was surprised not to see any White-rumped Swiftlets on the Ha'apai islands visited, but apparently they are absent from islands that lack caves (Pratt *et al.* 1987). I particularly looked for trillers on Lofanga — they were not seen or heard. My failure to record honeyeaters on Foa was probably an oversight.

The identity of the large skink on Tongatapu and Foa is a mystery. It is probably a species of *Emoia*, because this genus predominates in the region, and it is probably the same large skink that I saw on 'Eua in 1986 (Gill 1987). I do not know of any records of large *Emoia* from Tonga other than *E. cyanogaster* and *E. nigra* from Vava'u (R.I. Crombie, *pers. comm.*). Descriptions of neither of these seem to fit the animals I saw.

I did not see any Banded Iguanas (Fokai) *Brachylophus fasciatus* despite much searching, especially on Foa and Lofanga. However, several locals described chance encounters with very large green lizards with long tails on Lofanga and its offshore islet Hakauata.

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